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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VIENNA 000764

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/AGS

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SUBJECT: AUSTRIAN PRESIDENT DISCUSSES NABUCCO, ILISU,
COUNTERTERRORISM DURING TURKEY VISIT

REF: VIENNA 586

Classified by: CDA Scott F. Kilner for reasons 1.4 (b) and
(d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Austrian President Fischer discussed the Nabucco pipeline, the Ilisu dam project, counterterrorism, and Turkey's EU candidacy during a May 19-22 visit to Turkey, according to Turkish Embassy and Austrian MFA readouts. Fischer pressed Turkish President Gul and PM Erdogan on the need to sign an agreement to begin work on Nabucco; the Turks, however, presented a counter-draft reflecting changes sought by the Turkish side. Gul and Erdogan acknowledged delays in meeting the pre-conditions for the controversial Ilisu project, but assured Fischer Turkey would fulfill its obligations. Gul emphasized the need for bilateral cooperation against terrorism; Fischer noted that the GOA is waiting for Turkey set a date for counterterrorism talks. In an over-the-top diatribe, the leader of Turkey's ultra-secular CHP party told Fischer Turkey's ruling AKP party is a threat to Turkish secularism. According to Fischer's foreign policy advisor, the Austrian President was, overall, extremely satisfied with the visit. End Summary.

Visit Noteworthy for Size, Itinerary

¶12. (U) Ufuk Gezer, First Secretary at the Turkish Embassy in Vienna, told us that although Fischer broke no new political ground in his talks in Turkey, his visit was noteworthy for its timing, itinerary and the size of the delegation. The last presidential visit between the two countries took place 10 years ago, when then Turkish President Demirel traveled to Vienna. Fischer traveled with a large delegation -- about 150 members, including 60-70 businessmen -- and stayed three and a half days. In addition to Ankara and Istanbul, Fischer also traveled to the Anatolian industrial town of Kayseri. Gezer said the Turkish side appreciated Fischer's willingness to take up the Turks' recommendation that Kayseri be added to the schedule. European officials often travel to Diyarbakir, to focus on Turkey's Kurdish problem, while overlooking places like Kayseri, where Turkey's emerging economic power is on display, he said.

Fischer Holds Line on EU Bid

¶13. (C) Fischer, like Austrian FM Plassnik in April (reftel), repeated the GOA's longstanding position that Austria supports Turkey's EU accession process, but the final outcome is open ended. Gezer said the Turks were disappointed that Fischer did not deviate from the GOA line -- the Embassy had reported to Ankara that Fischer is more supportive of Turkey's EU candidacy than Chancellor Gusenbauer, and would subtly criticize the GOA stance. Clemens Koja, MFA director for Southern Europe, told us Fischer is indeed more supportive of Turkey than Gusenbauer, but is reluctant to say so openly.

Ilisu Dam

¶4. (U) Fischer discussed at length the controversial Ilisu Dam project, which is being jointly financed by Austrian, Swiss, and German credit institutions. The Austrian President pressed his Turkish interlocutors on Turkey's failure to comply with most of the pre-conditions for the project, many of which involve environmental concerns, the preservation of historical artifacts, and the rights of residents being relocated. Gezer said Turkish officials acknowledged delays due to "technical problems," while assuring Fischer Turkey will meet its obligations.

Nabucco: "Back to Square One"

¶5. (C) Koja said that during discussion of the Nabucco pipeline, the Turks repeated their longstanding efforts to leverage Turkey's role as a transit country to secure gas supplies. Fischer replied that Turkey needed to sign the bilateral agreement prepared in accordance with European conditions. The Turks, however, presented their own counter draft. "We are now back to square one," Koja said. Nevertheless, Austrian Economics Minister Bartenstein, who accompanied Fischer on the trip, said privately that he believed the Turks could be convinced in the end to sign an agreement on European terms, according to Koja.

¶6. (C) At one point in the discussions, Erdogan assured the Austrians that Turkey was committed to Nabucco. Erdogan then confused his interlocutors by suggesting, "we need to talk to the Russians" about advancing the project. "I'm not sure what he meant by that," Koja said.

Counterterror Dialogue

¶7. (C) Gul stressed the need for the Turkish and Austrian Justice Ministries to coordinate counterterror efforts, according to Koja. Fischer noted that the GOA had proposed a date to begin a dialogue on counterterrorism and other issues, but had received no reply from Ankara. "That's typical of the Turks," Koja said. "They continue to complain about lack of coordination, but they don't give you a date to start."

Turks Mum on AKP Court Case

¶8. (C) Fischer cautiously mentioned the ongoing court case against Turkey's ruling AKP party. While emphasizing that he did not want to meddle in the affairs of Turkey's judiciary, he averred that it would be "unthinkable" in Europe to attempt to close a mainstream party like the AKP, Koja said. The Turks, even at the working level, were visibly uncomfortable with the topic and said little, according to Koja.

Baykal Launches Anti-AKP Diatribe

¶9. (C) Deniz Baykal, leader of Turkey's ultra-secular CHP party, launched an "apocalyptic" anti-AKP diatribe in his meeting with Fischer, Koja said. Baykal accused the AKP of plotting to turn Turkey into a sharia state, and defended the use of legal bans against political parties as a means of protecting Ataturk's vision of a secular state. Koja said Baykal lost credibility with Fischer due to his over-the-top performance.

Fischer "Very Satisfied"

¶10. (C) In a separate conversation, Fischer's Foreign Policy Advisor Alfons Kloss told the Charge that the Austrian President was highly satisfied with his visit overall. The

two presidents strengthened an already good personal rapport.

PM Erdogan also impressed the Austrians as "a real player" in the region with seemingly impressive personal connections to the leaders in almost all neighboring states. The one exception to this positive picture, Kloss conceded, was Nabucco. "Geography gives the Turks a lot of leverage," he said, "and they are using it."

Kilner